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Hasenfus retracts charge linking Contra suppliers, CIA

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (Reuters) — Downed American flier Eugene Hasenfus, speaking in court, yesterday retracted his charge that two Cuban-Americans supervising operations to supply the resistance forces were U.S. intelligence agents, one of them a friend of Vice President George Bush.

Mr. Hasenfus acknowledged in court an earlier confession that he had delivered arms to the U.S.-backed resistance fighting Nicaragua's Marxist-led Sandinista government, but pulled back from his CIA charge.

"I said that Gomez and Ramon Medina worked for the CIA and that Max Gomez was a personal friend of George Bush," Mr. Hasenfus, 45, told the special people's tribunal hearing the case.

"I had this from Bill Cooper and from the other pilots. But I had no direct knowledge," he added.

Mr. Cooper, who recruited Mr. Hasenfus, was killed with another U.S. crew member and an unidentified Nicaraguan radio operator when their C-123 cargo plane was shot down over southern Nicaragua on Oct. 5.

Mr. Hasenfus parachuted from the plane and was captured a day later.

Despite Mr. Hasenfus' retraction, the state prosecutor said he had enough evidence to convict the American of the most serious charges, which carry a possible 30-year prison term.

The handwritten manuscript of Mr. Hasenfus' confession was presented yesterday to the tribunal, and Mr. Hasenfus was asked to read it and say whether it was genuine.

Mr. Hasenfus said the statement was correct but then asked to make a change in what he had said about Messrs. Medina and Gomez, Cuban-

Americans involved in the day-to-day running of the supply flights to the resistance forces, also known as Contras.

Testimony by Mr. Hasenfus and information from documents recovered from the wreckage of the plane prompted allegations in the United States that the Reagan administration may have violated a congressional ban on U.S. involvement in funneling arms to the resistance.

Vice President Bush, a former director of the CIA, has admitted he knew Max Gomez — whose real name was said in U.S. press reports to be Felix Rodriguez — but denied

involvement in the operation.

Mr. Hasenfus' appearance in court yesterday was his second of the weekend. On Saturday, he listened as the Sandinista soldiers who shot down the plane and captured him gave their evidence.

Chief Prosecutor Rodrigo Reyes told reporters after the hearing that Mr. Hasenfus' confession was enough to convict him. Officials have said there is virtually no chance Mr. Hasenfus will be acquitted, but that a government pardon is possible after his conviction.

[President Daniel Ortega blamed "imperialist aggression" along Nicaragua's northern border with Honduras for recent fighting that killed an estimated 100 soldiers and rebels in the past week, United Press International reports.]

[Mr. Ortega's comments, printed in the official government newspaper Barricada, followed a Defense Ministry report Saturday that estimated 80 members of the resistance and 21 government soldiers killed in "intense and uninterrupted" fighting that began Oct. 24. It said 120 resistance fighters and 16 soldiers were also wounded. The resistance has not issued a casualty count.]

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